Groups of the Ainu People in Japan and Russia



Project Title	Groups of the Ainu People in Japan and Russia	
Project Summary	Many indigenous peoples of Russia bear an uncanny resemblance to those who live in the US. They build Yaranga or Chum which look like dwellings of Plains peoples. The Ainu in Russia are not Federally recognized, but they are in Japan. Help us learn more about paradoxes of Ainu identity.	
Country	United States	

Project Description

According to the Census authority of the Russian Federation, the Ainu are extinct. Those who identify as Ainu, neither speak the Ainu language, nor practice any aspect of the traditional Ainu culture. In social behavior and customs, they are almost identical with the Old Russian settlers of Kamchatka and therefore the benefits which are given to the Itelmen cannot be given to the Ainu of Kamchatka. The Ainu language is extinct in Russia. The Bolsheretsky Kurile stopped using it as early as the beginning of the 20th century. Only 3 fluent speakers remained in Sakhalin as of 1979, and the language was extinct by the 1980s there. Takei Asai, the last speaker of Sakhalin Ainu, died in Japan in 1994. In Japan, there is a law to protect the Ainu. Both Russia and Japan signed the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Shortly after signing the treaty, the Japanese Diet passed a law to protect them. In the Ainu language, "Cise" means "House", which is pronounced by placing a high pitch on "se" instead of "ci". This word has often been used, even in the Japanese vernacular, specifically to refer to a house thatched with saw grass or bamboo grass. The word "Cise" persists to this day in the Ainu language spoken in Japan, and it refers to housing units built by modern construction methods. Ainu elders often use the word as such in their conversation. Despite the changes in the selection of materials and construction methods, "Cise" remains unchanged and still means a house in the Ainu language. While the Ainu serve as a bridge between the past of the Kamchatka peninsula, Sakhalin Island, and Japan, that past may have been irreversibly changed during the period of the Russo-Japanese War to the Cold War. We hope to discover many cultural and social phenomena surrounding the Ainu, including their starring in movies similar to the US "Western" genre in Japan. Some of the research has already been done, but deeper dives are needed to unravel all the associations in the evidence and to discover more material.

Required Skills or Interests

Skill(s)

Analytical writing

Cultural diplomacy				
Research				
Writing				

Additional Information

"I am caught within a circle from which there is no escape: the less human societies were able to communicate with each other and therefore to corrupt each other through contact, the less their respective emissaries were able to perceive the wealth and significance of their diversity." The significance of these lines echo through my past having once been a student of Harry Harootunian many years ago. Yes, he was trapped in Marxism, and I am not, but that is not what I mean here. The Ainu present a real quandary to people of Indigenous identity or ancestry throughout the world. They are an indigenous community partitioned by wars and ideological conflict, recognized in one place with a unique nativism all its own, actively erased in another place, stridently internationalist in its own way. They offer all kinds of rich questions very relevant to the contemporary space that native or indigenous peoples occupy, ones whose answers have not been always deeply sought but ones which can be revealed through careful, factual scholarship I hope.

Language Requirements

Language Speaking Proficiency		Reading Proficiency	Importance
Japanese	Minimum professional proficiency Minimum professional proficiency Required		
Russian	Minimum professional proficienc	y Minimum professional proficienc	y Required